

## CEMETERIES

# Crematorium is little-known town resource

**Duxbury built it 19 years ago without hoopla**

By KENDRA JOHNSON  
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**DUXBURY** — Mayflower Cemetery is a local historic landmark dotted with trees and graves that date back to the 18th century.

It is also home to what may be the only crematorium in the country owned by a municipality.

The Mayflower Cemetery crematorium is one of 13 in the state and handles more than 2,000 bodies a year.

But a newcomer to town may never know it exists. The crematory occupies an unassuming position in the cemetery in a small complex of quaint gray buildings, including an office and a storage shed.

Residents said the crematory was built 19 years ago without much hoopla.

"It was very non-controversial," Selectman Margaret Kearney said. "(There were) just a few humorous speeches about it . . . and it passed."

Annual town meeting authorized the town to operate a crematory in 1978, and the facility was built in 1980 with two smokestacks. Two more smokestacks were added nine years ago.

Many crematoriums in the country are run by funeral home directors, but Massachusetts requires that a crematorium be operated along with a cemetery of at least 20 acres.

Twenty-six of Mayflower Cemetery's 40 acres are developed. The earliest grave is from 1787.

Jack Springer, executive director of the Cremation Association of North America, said he does not know of any other crematoriums owned by a city or town.

The crematory was built to increase revenue for the cemetery, according to the 1979 town report. The year before, the number of burials was 15 percent below average.

Superintendent of Cemeteries Joseph Ziobro manages the crematorium. Cremations at the facility have increased recently from 1,888 in 1995 to more than 2,300 last year. The Mayflower Cemetery crematorium handles the largest volume of cremations in the northeast.

Cremations are also on the rise nationwide. In 1975, there were more than 425 crematoriums and nearly 150,000 cremations, according to CANA. In 1997, there were 1,256 crematoriums and 541,163 cremations.

"Cremation is accepted now," Springer said. "It's no longer looked at as something out of the ordinary."

A cremation takes about 2¼ hours, with a few more hours needed to cool and process the remains.

Ziobro said being the director of a crematorium can be more stressful than running a cemetery because the process leaves no room for mistakes.

The Duxbury crematorium staff includes Ziobro, two crematorium operators, a departmental assistant and a grounds foreman. The employees are part of the Public Works Department.

Ziobro said the Mayflower Cemetery crematorium serves funeral di-

rectors throughout the state, but the majority of its business comes from within a 30 mile radius.

John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife, Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, and her sister, Lauren Bessette, who died off Martha's Vineyard in a July plane crash, were cremated in Duxbury.

There are no crematoriums on the Cape, but Yarmouth has considered building a crematorium on town property to lease to a private operator.

Yarmouth town meeting has approved building a crematory in the Chandler Grey Cemetery and issuing a long-term lease for the facility. But a motion involving a zoning bylaw failed at April town meeting.

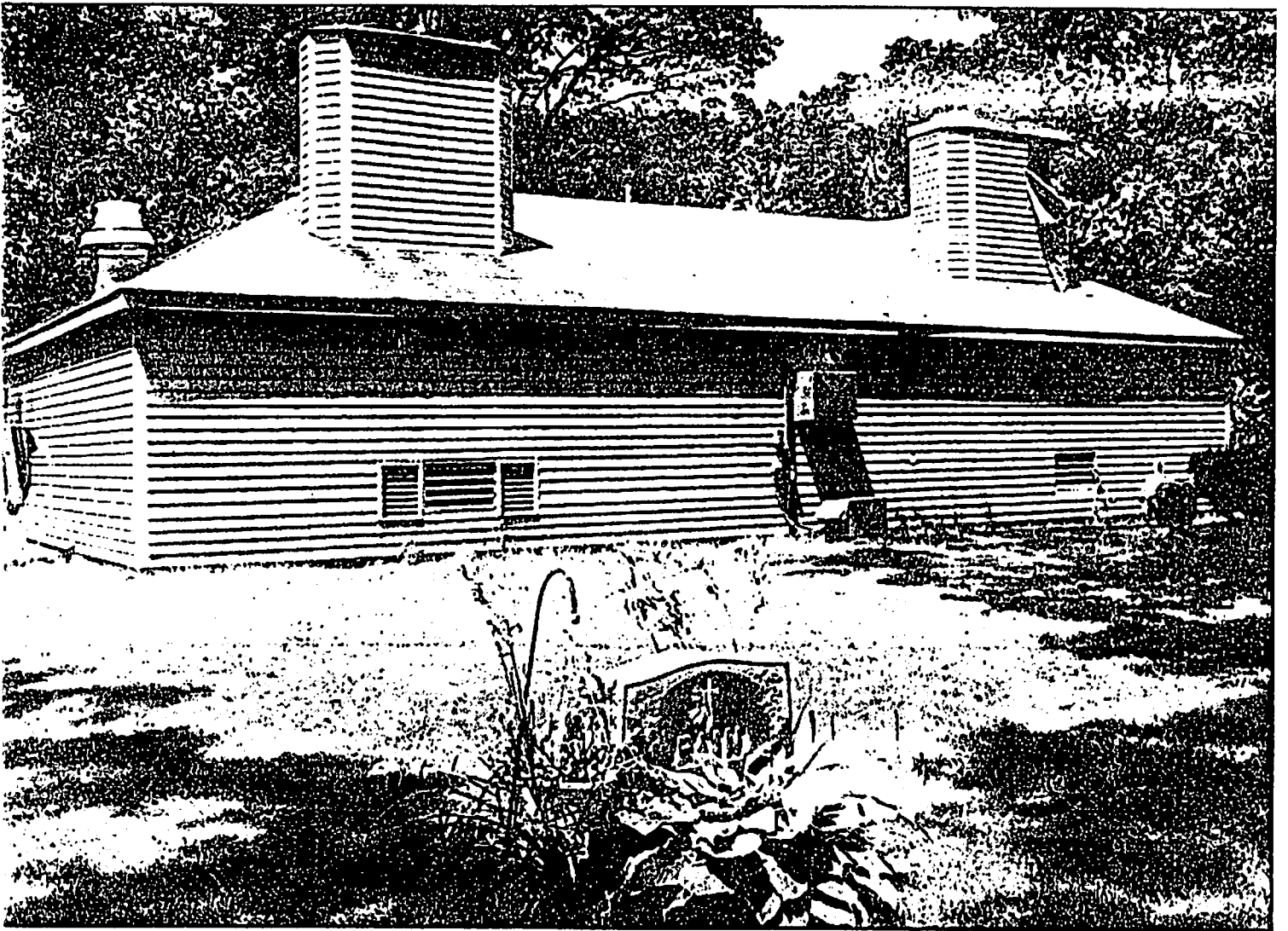
"Right now, it is in limbo," said Philip Whitten, director of parks and cemeteries in Yarmouth. "We need to go back and look at the will of the town and see if we want to proceed."

Ziobro said Duxbury town officials may have to consider expanding the crematorium if another one does not open in the area.

"We're running at capacity now, so there has to be some thought given to whether we expand or limit the business," Ziobro said.

Whitten said the Yarmouth crematory proposal was partly initiated because of the need for another facility in the area.

The Evergreen Cemetery Association has a proposal to build a two-furnace crematory in Kingston.



GARY HIGGINS/The Patriot Ledger

the town-owned crematorium, which occupies an unassuming building at Mayflower Cemetery in Duxbury, is one of 13 crematoriums the state.